

Ecmel Aysu Sürmen's GIV Blog

Hello, merhaba, hallo, dia duit, olá, مرحبا, שלום!

My name is Ecmel Aysu Sürmen and this year I was chosen for Governor's Institute of Vermont (GIV) on Current Issues and Youth Activism. I spent 15 days there and they were definitely the best days of my life.

It is so hard for me to write about my days in Vermont. Expressing how I feel about my experience in 500 words is as difficult as defining a whole personality in three words. I am so sorry that the time went by so fast there. It has been two weeks since I returned to Turkey, and I still feel like it is not over.

It was a rainy night when we first arrived in Vermont and we were exhausted after 12 hours of flying. My roommates (Ruby, Christal, Michaela - amazing girls!) hadn't arrived there yet. I was alone in my dorm room and thinking about how lucky I was. The next morning I went out of my dorm and was stunned with the beauty of view. The campus was surrounded by a forest and it was so beautiful. Soon after, our lovely staff members guided us for a tour through the camp. In the afternoon, everyone arrived at GIV. It is always so fun to meet new people and try to teach them how to pronounce your name (it was really hard for me! "E-C-M-E-L, but pronounce the C as J...") as well as learn about their cultures and languages. I really love it!

All the activities at GIV were really fun. I loved that we always had different activity options and were able to choose what we really wanted to learn. We had issue groups, very interesting workshops (about immigration, leadership, education, HIV etc.), forum theatre groups, wisdom trees sections and also some extra activities (including the 4th of July parade, model United Nations, a ropes course, canoeing, barn dance, drumming, swimming, camp fire, watching movies, open mic show and more!).

The "Climate Change" group was my issue group. I learned really interesting stuff about our environment and global warming. Even though we knew that global warming is getting worse, we were full of hope. At least, we were aware that we could change something and make a difference. We believed that "We are the Change". With the help of our amazing teacher John, we prepared a co-opera to make our friends aware of it, too. It was a real success.

We also had interesting "Forum Theatre" groups such as; making music videos, photography, drama, music, dance, writing etc. I was filming a music video with an amazing group of people. We listened to some songs and decided to use five of them (three in English, one in Turkish and one in German). After that, we started filming. We rolled down the hill, made a fake war, prepared signs, and wrote messages on our bodies. At the end, we edited all the videos and created our new social justice music video! If you would like to watch it, use the link here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkgOWte6z-M&feature=player_embedded)

In our "wisdom trees" sessions, we did really amusing things such as dancing and tasting chocolate, using nail polish, etc. Once we had a Turkish & Irish language class (as teachers!) with our Irish friend Paul in our section. Yağmur, Tamer and I taught basic Turkish to our foreign friends and learned basic Irish at the same time!

We also had the chance of presenting our country to everyone. It was a great opportunity to show

more about our culture and break the stereotypes. We talked about Atatürk, our history, cuisine, general facts about Turkey and some current issues. For our presentation, we discussed "Women Rights in Turkey" as a current issue. At the end of our presentation, we danced one of our Turkish traditional dances, "Damat Halayı" :)

As you have read, I experienced lots of amazing adventures in VT, although the 4th of July parade was probably the best of them. Nuri, Paul and I prepared a huge cardboard saying "Love for Everyone" in many languages. Walking in a crowd with cardboards and saying these things out loud was so exciting and new to me. The atmosphere was just so great!

Now I am at my home, looking at our pictures and thinking how lucky I am. Now I know that I have another family, spread all over the world: USA, Ireland, Germany, Egypt, Brazil, Israel, and so on. But most importantly, I have amazing memories that will stay with me for a lifetime.

As Simon said; it is not a goodbye. Hello forever everyone. Thanks for everything.